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C O N F I D E N T I A L NAIROBI 001429

SIPDIS

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DEPT FOR AF/E AND A/S FRAZER

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PTER ASEC MOPS SO ET UG

SUBJECT: Somali Truce Breaks Down -- Heavy Fighting

Classified by PolOff John O'Leary. Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

Ref: A) Nairobi 1303 B) Nairobi 1401 C) Nairobi 1322

¶11. (U) According to multiple sources, early this morning, March 29, Ethiopian troops began deploying in Mogadishu neighborhoods while Ethiopian armored vehicles and "technicals" (pick-up trucks with mounted heavy weapons) took up positions at strategic intersections. Around 0530, militia fighters attacked the Ethiopians. As of 1000 local, the fighting appeared to be concentrated around the stadium, the former defense ministry, and the Hotel Ramadan in northeast Mogadishu. Contacts in the city noted that the Ethiopians did not appear to be advancing. As of 1200 local, multiple contacts indicated that neither Transitional Federal Government (TFG) nor Ugandan troops were involved in the fighting. As of 1330 local, contacts in Mogadishu reported that the Ethiopians were beginning to withdraw to their camps, except around the stadium in the north where they appeared to be encamping.

¶12. (U) Contacts reported Ethiopian helicopters flying over the city throughout the morning. By mid-afternoon, contacts reported that they were firing rockets and machine guns at targets in the city.

¶13. (U) The Ethiopians reportedly had told the Hawiye clan elders earlier in the week that they planned to deploy their troops throughout the city. The elders rejected the deployment pending mutually agreeable security arrangements, but the Ethiopians went in anyway. The elders are blaming the Ethiopians for today's fighting, saying the Ethiopians broke last week's truce by deploying without clan consent.

¶14. (U) The identity of the militias engaging the Ethiopians is unknown; but they are probably a mix of clan and radical Islamic fighters.

¶15. (U) The media is reporting eight dead so far, but a final casualty count probably will be considerably higher. The extent of damage is unknown but probably will be significant.

¶16. (C) Comment. Numerous contacts in Mogadishu are calling today's fighting the most serious in years. The Ethiopians appear to have targeted areas inhabited primarily by the Hawiye clan's Haber Gedir sub-clan, although an Abgal sub-clan area was also involved. It is too soon to tell whether Ethiopia's action today will keep the Hawiye/Abgal sub-clan on the sidelines or drive them into the arms of their Haber Gedir cousins.

¶17. (C) Comment continued. Although Islamic radicals undoubtedly took part in today's fighting, the battle was between a clan and Ethiopian troops, not between Islamic terrorists and Ethiopians. The absence of TFG troops from the battle may be the one bright spot that leaves the door open to reconciliation--though that may

depend on how President Yusuf and his government react over the next few days. Islamic radicals can be expected to use today's events to "confirm" that Somalia is yet another Muslim-Christian battleground and bolster their case for "jihad". End comment.

Ranneberger